

# IN THE BEGINNING



**"The Standoff"**

**Published Quarterly By  
Woodson County Historical Society  
Yates Center, Kansas  
Vol. 16 - No. 62**

## IN THE BEGINNING

Vol. 16-No. 62

April, 1983

Lester A. Harding, Editor

### Editor's Notes —

Each January issue of **In The Beginning** we try and make a red cross in a box at the heading on the first page. We had very good luck this year but there are quite a few that have not paid their subscription to this quarterly. Those who find their paper marked with red will be reminded that they have not paid their subscription for 1983.

If those who have not paid by the time that the July issue comes out will not get the July issue.

\* \* \* \* \*

Some of the pictures that we are using in this issue come from far away places. The large picture of the John Bayer family was sent to us by Mrs. Dorothy Bayer Watts, of Santa Maria, California.

The picture of the Yates Center High School Girls Basketball team was sent to us by the coach in the picture, Bonnie Ramey (Mrs. Ira) Stockebrand, of Austin, Texas.

We were hoping that we would have a picture of John T. Owens, "The Armless Wonder". He was a familiar figure around Yates Center around 85-90 years ago.

\* \* \* \* \*

We call our cover picture of this issue, "The Standoff". We took this picture quite a few years ago at the home of Mr. and Mrs. Lloyd Herdman, when they lived about two miles south of Neosho Falls. Lloyd's old pointer dog seemed to get quite a kick of tormenting the big white rooster. But the old rooster seemed to enjoy it as much as the pointer did. "Tag" was the name of the pointer who lived to be 15 years old and died of a heart attack and had to be put to sleep. The old rooster seemed to enjoy the fracas as much as Tag did and would go look for the dog if he wasn't out to fight.

\* \* \* \* \*

## IN THE BEGINNING

Published Quarterly By  
Woodson County Historical Society  
Yates Center, Kansas

\$4.00 per year

1

\$1.00 per copy

WOODSON COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY  
Organized March, 1965

The Eighteenth Annual meeting of the Woodson County Historical Society was held Tuesday evening, January 25, 1983, at the 107 Inn, for the 6:30 evening dinner. There were 46 members and seven guests present.

The Nominating Committee - Van Gustin, Christina Cramer and Glenn Shaw presented the names for the following positions; President, Kenneth Stockebrand; Vice Pres., Faye Hibbard; Secretary, Esther Lewis; Treasurer, Gladys Rodger; Director's for six year terms were: Mrs. Betty Collins and Lester Harding. The other Directors are, Leo Collins, Christina Cramer, Phyliss Gustin and Mary Blevins.

The program for the evening was presented by Mrs. Eugene Stephan of Yates Center. Mrs. Stephan is a native of France. She gave an interesting short history of that country and showed many slides of various places.

\* \* \* \* \*

IN MEMORIAN

Iva Palmer Ashley                      92                      December 7, 1982

Mrs. Ashley was born in Yates Center and lived her entire life here. She was a Charter Member of the Woodson County Historical Society.

\* \* \* \* \*

Plans are being made for Woodson County Historical to obtain possession of the old native stone jail in Yates Center. Contract was let to build this jail at the same time that the contract for the present courthouse was made. In the Yates Center News of April 21, 1899, a drawing of the new courthouse appeared with the notice that a contract had been let for the building of the courthouse and jail at the cost of \$22,147.00.

This old jail was condemned in November, 1963, but was used until June, 1967. At that time it was declared to be totally unfit for human habitation. The old jail is on property owned by the Street Abstract Co., Inc. By the next issue of **In The Beginning** is out it should belong to the Historical Society.

\* \* \* \* \*

Join and Support  
WOODSON COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Life Membership \$25.00

2

Regular \$2.00

## JOHN H. BAYER FAMILY —

For many years John H. Bayer was a successful stockman along Owl Creek, in the New York Valley vicinity. Mr. Bayers was born in the province of Hanover, Germany, April 14, 1836. When about fifteen years old he secured in advance the money necessary to pay his passage to America, and in the year 1851 he sailed from the port of Bremen. Reaching New York he found that he had less than a half dollar, and that was later stolen from him. He began working in the butchering business for his brother-in-law, and remained in New York until July, 1854, when he went to South Carolina. After working at different locations he started in the butcher business on his own account. This was a successful enterprise from 1860 to 1865.

During this time John H. Bayer was married to Dorothea Teleke, a native of Germany. They were the parents of four children as, follows: Frederick H., John T., Rebecca E., and Gusta H., the first two were born in New York.

In the fall of 1865, the John H. Bayer family arrived in Woodson County, and located in Sec. 23, Twp. 25, R. 15. Mr. Bayer soon became interested in politics. He was elected as County Commissioner in 1877 and 1880. In the election of 1890, he was elected as Representative to the Kansas Legislature, and re-elected in 1892.

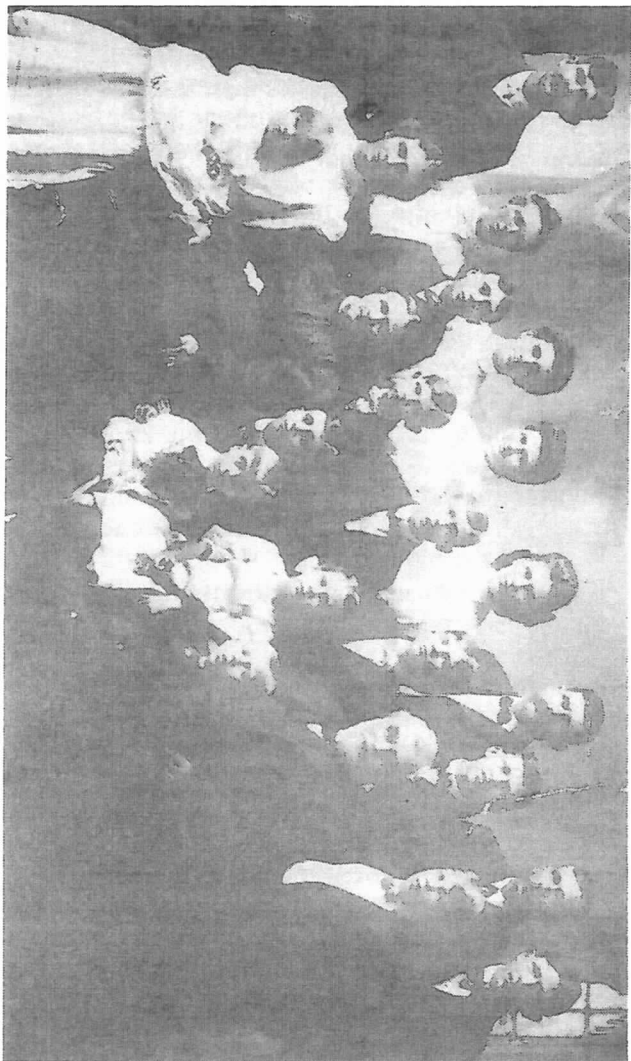
The Bayer farm was one of the main farms in the county having the second largest barn in the county and the first farm to have a name, "Clover Valley Farm". Mr. Bayer raised much red clover. He became noted for his fine Shorthorn cattle. Being a member of the Central Shorthorn Breeder's Association of the United States, and was active in the Woodson County Stock Show.

In 1876, Mrs. Dorothea Bayer died, and in September, 1877, J.H. Bayer married Augusta Staub, who had come to Kansas in 1858, and on to Woodson County in 1877.

Taking up the children of John H. and Dorothea Bayer.

Frederick H. Bayer was born in New York City, April 21, 1863, and spent most of his life in Woodson County as a farmer and stock raiser. On October 19, 1887, Frederick H. Bayer was married to Miss Mary E. Seitz. They were parents of six children namely: Dora, John, Henry, Charles, Edgar, and Clarence.

John T. (Ted) Bayer was born in New York City, July 21, 1865. He grew up on the farm along Owl Creek, and was a breeder of shorthorn cattle. He helped organize the first Woodson County Stock Show. On the 14th of June, 1893 he was married to Miss Carrie J. Shotts. They were the parents of four children,



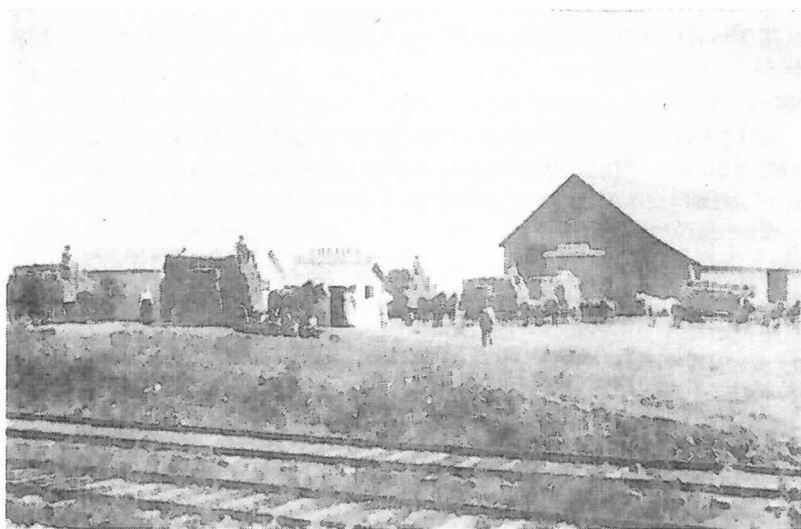
Picture of the J.H. Bayer family taken in 1906. Back row, L to R: John T. (Ted) Bayer, Mary, Augusta, Rebecca, Dora, Wm. H. Stockebrand, John Bayer. Boys in center row L to R: John Stockebrand, Ed, Charles, Ted, Henry, and Fred Bayer. Ted and Fred were twins. Carrie holding Winifred; Augusta the mother, Walter and Alfred Stockebrand; Dorothy B., Clarence and J.H. Bayer.

Theodore L. and Frederick H. twins, Dorothy and Winifred.

Rebecca E. Bayer was married to Wm. H. Lehman.

Augusta H. Bayer was married to William H. Stockebrand. They lived most of their married life on a farm along Duck Creek in northwest Woodson County. Their children were three sons, John, Walter, and Alfred. William and Augusta were both born in Woodson County.

While the Frederick H. Bayer family lived along Big Sandy Creek, his extensive dealing in prairie hay was done mostly at Batesville where he had several hay barns scales and office.



**This picture shows the Bayer hay office with name "F.H. Bayer - Dealer in Hay" - one of the large hay barns and six wagon loads of bales, along with a residence near by.**

\* \* \* \* \*

When the J.H. Bayer family first came here to Woodson County, they purchased a farm near where his sister Mrs. Conrad Herder lived. They lived in a log cabin for the first four years and about 1869, Mr. Bayer made a trip to Ft. Leavenworth to bring back walnut lumber for the starting of a new house. He also purchased and brought back scarce foods and other supplies from there.



## **ODDS and ENDS —**

**JUNE 30, 1899** — Stone tenders and laborers on the courthouse job went out on strike Monday evening without telling their grievance to the time keeper, Wirick. Probably they wanted higher wages.

Later - Some of the older men have gone back to work, and a number of new ones have been hired.

**JULY 7, 1899** — Mr. Guffeys telephone system was put in operation last Saturday and now one can talk to his neighbors across the square without leaving his place of business.

**MARCH 9, 1900** — August Krueger bought a new gasoline engine this week. It will be used to run his ice cream freezer and the fans in the summer time.

**JUNE 15, 1900** — Ernest Stockebrand probably holds the record for the largest individual hay raiser in the county. He recently sold Henry Schlickting 590 tons besides keeping his feed hay.

**JULY 13, 1900** — The new Ceder Creek Church. Trustees-C.T. Weide, Chairman. Church was dedicated Sept. 30, 1900. Rev. J.H. Tobias, Presiding Elder official, afternoon preaching in English and in evening in German. The new church was 26 x 38 feet and cost \$900.

**JANUARY 4, 1901** — Opening of Apollo Hall was dedicated on New Years night, by J.E. Wirick. The first toast by G.H. Lamb. "J.E. Wirick and his Enterprise." Prominent citizens take part in an interesting program. There were 700 in attendance. (Location)?

**APRIL 26, 1901** — For the past year it has not been safe for a woman to come on the streets after 4 o'clock in the afternoon on Saturday's without being subjected to insults and crowded off the sidewalks by drunken men. The condition of things is now being revolutionized and our people should and doubtless will stand by the officers in breaking up this practice. The streets on Saturday nights should be as free from profanity, slang and drunken men as they are any other night of the week.

**FARMERS ADVOCATE, Yates Center-August 13, 1897** —

Maple Grove and Stone Pile will play the world's great game of (base) ball on the grounds of lower Cherry Creek, north of Mr. C. Peters, on Saturday, August 14, at 2 p.m. sharp. Ice cold lemonade will be served to quench the well known unbearable thirst of ball players at 5 cents a lint. Committee.

## HISTORY OF PRAIRIE FLOWER DIST. NO 22

This district was formed in October, 1870 under Superintendent Williams of Neosho Falls. At the first annual school meeting Michael Reedy was elected Director; William Hartwig, Treasurer; and J. E. Taylor, Clerk. At a special meeting held April 14th Bonds were voted for building a schoolhouse. This building was sixteen by twenty. The first term was taught by Mrs. Edith Wass. This term began April 17, 1871 and ended July 17, 1871. She received a salary of \$28 a month.

The second term was taught by Edith Sprague and the third term by S.M. Cooper.

Michael Reedy held the position of Director from 1870 to 1893. William Hartwig held the position of Treasurer from 1870 to 1890. Among the scholars enrolled in 1877 were: Fanny and Charles Taylor; Kate, Ella, James, and William Reedy; Oran Tatman; Charles and Caroline Ostmier; Cara and Minnie Elmendorf; John, Mary, Agnes, Grayston, Melissa, Flora, and Caron Rover.

On November 6, 1890 it was voted to issue bonds for \$400 to build a new schoolhouse. The old building was sold for \$26. This new building is the one that now stands in this district. A cloak room was added later. This district is known quite widely as the Reedy District. The building was located on land formerly belonging to Michael Reedy. Even more the Reedy's have won a name in that there has been a Reedy in school since it was organized.

Cookville, a postoffice, was located on the Elliot Cole farm in this district. This was located there from 1881 to 1904 or 5, when the rural routes were started.

The school term which formerly began in October and ended in March was changed to September and ended in March or a seven month term in 1911. In 1924, the eight month term and eight grades took the place of seven month term and the nine grades.

In 1929-30 there were 38 pupils under Carrie V. Umbarger. This was the highest number enrolled in school in one year.

This district was neglected when it came to natural resources such as oil, or gas; and railroads or industries. This makes it of low valuation.

The above history of Prairie Flower Dist. No. 22, was written in 1936, evidently by the teacher at that time.

In April, 1918, the teacher Mary Herder sent her report to the Clerk of the district, W.L. Cole, with the following pupils enrolled.



Clayton Blandy, Leo Domitz, Leo Huffmaster, Emma and Katie Huffmaster; Charley, Marie, Margaret, Katherine, Eva, and Genevieve Reedy. Robert Schultz, Freddie and Willie Seidel; Marjorie and Vernal Cole; Susan and Helen Domitz; Glenetta Galloup, Madelin, Lucinda, Mahala, Gladys and Birdie Poe.

\* \* \* \* \*

Pupils attending Dist. 22 during the term of 1932-33, were Doris Lee and Virginia Reedy; Dorothy and Frances Domitz; Mary and Frances Becannon; Margaret, Lucille, and John F. Crahan; Mae Eva Smith, Alva Hoag, William, and Myron Leonard.

The list of teachers at District 22, from 1881, until the closing of the school, with the exception that some years may be missing after 1900.

The teachers were - Webb, Annie DeVaney, Delia Flemming, L.S. Myler, Olive Redmond, Nellie DeVaney, Cornelia Harp, Acla Hassenpflug, Nellie Wise, Theresa Clark, Mattie Thorp, Daisy Browning, Ella Bradford, 1900-Ora Henderson, Dora Harmon, 2 terms; Mary Phillips, Jesse Gepharte, Frances Denner, 2 terms; Clara Klein, Emma S. Reed, Ruth Augustine, Alma Evans, Emma Reed, Mary Herder, Mary Herder Culver, Iva Pickering, 2 terms, 1920-22; Opal Moerer, Helen Richards, 3 terms; Mildred Nantz, Helen Richards, Fern Moore, 2 terms, 1928-29.

Teachers starting in 1930 - Carrie Umbarger, Teresa Link, Lillian Land, 2 terms; Opal Clement, 2 terms; Lois Ann Meath, Nora Hess, Mrs. Pearl Pollman, 3 terms; Neva Riley, Mrs. Frances Moyer, 4 terms; Mrs. Helen Leonard, 1945; Mrs. Jean Mundinger, Helen Leonard, Dorothy Moyer, Dorothy Wolf Ross, Mardell Englebrecht, 2 terms; Betty Heady. This was the last term of school at Prairie Flower Dist. #22, in 1953.

\* \* \* \* \*

The Clerk's Report for 1922, shows 22 pupils attending this school.

Elinor, Marjorie and Vernal Cole; Irene, Madelin, and Paul Crahan; Leo, Louis, Susan, Helen, and Mary Domitz; Catherine and Leo Huffmaster; Owen and Lucille Mallory; George Pratt, Charles, Marie, Margaret, Catherine, Eva, Genevieve, and Paul Reedy. Florence and Shirley Smith, Melvin, Robert, and George Shultz.

## **MORE ABOUT THE NIKKEL FAMILIES —**

This story will be about another Benjamin Nikkel. What is different from the first one is that this Benjamin has no middle initial. However, this story will deal more with two of his sons, Cornelious and Peter F. Nikkel. Also this Benjamin is the father of Benj. J. Nikkel.

The movement by these early Mennonites to come to America started around 1874. Each family group would chose some member of their group to represent them and come to America to see about the land and conditions.

For the Nikkel group Peter F. was chosen. Peter F. was one of twelve to come here first. The family of Peter F., came to America in May, 1875. They first settled in Marion County, before coming to Woodson County in the Nikkeltown area. His wife was Katharina Bergmann, who he married in 1874, just before coming to America.

The claim that Peter F. purchased from the Katy R. R. was the south 80 acres in the southwest quarter of Sec. 35-Twp. 24-R.14. The Nikkeltown schoolhouse that was their church and the Nikkel Burying Place, were all on the land of Peter F.



**Peter F. and Katharina (Bergmann) Nikkel, and a daughter.**

Their children were, Heinrich and Cornelious J. twins, they were sons of Katharina, by her first marriage, but were adopted by Peter F. Nikkel. Peter B. and Aganetha, were also twins; Katharina, Maria (Mary), Helena, Benjamin I, Helena, Benjamin II, Agatha.

Heinrich homesteaded in Alberta, Canada where he was killed while clearing land.

Cornelious J., was married to Ida Nikkel, a first cousin. They lived around Nikkletown for awhile.

Peter B. Nikkel was raised around Nikkeltown and married Lydia ?, Lydia died in childbirth and is buried at Nikkeltown. The baby Lydia was adopted and raised by Peter's sister Katharina and family. They moved to Loveland, Colo.

Aganetha was born at Hillsboro, but was married at Nikkeltown, Sept. 1896 to Isaac Boerg.

Katharina was born at Nikkeltown, July 4, 1876. Here she was married to Cornelious Klingenberg. He had come to America in 1876, with his parents Cornelious and Renata Klingenberg.

Maria Nikkel, born in October, 1877, at Nikkeltown. Maria or Mary, was married to John Klingenberg, a brother to Cornelious who married Aganetha. They later moved to Colo.

Benjamin I, born Dec., 1878, at Nikkeltown and died Sept. 5, 1879, buried in Nikkel Burying Place.

Helena Nikkel was married to Joe Newlan, at Gridley, Mar. 18, 1880.

Benjamin Nikkel II, born July 29, 1881 and died Sept. 21, 1898. Also buried at Nikkeltown.

Ida Nikkel was born at Nikkeltown, Feb. 5, 1883. Married L. Loepp.

Agatha Nikkel was born at Nikkeltown, Aug. 4, 1884 and died Aug. 25, 1884. Buried at Nikkel Burying Place.

Around September, 1892, a number of the Woodson County families along with some from Marion decided to move to Jose, Yuma County, Colorado.

The Nikkels loaded their livestock and implements on a freight train. The families themselves and camping supplies made the trip in covered wagons. Unfortunately Peter F. was going on the freight train and while loading it one of the brakemen on the train mistook Peter F. for a hobo and hit him over the head with a large wrench and killed him. We believe that this accident happened near Whitewater, Kansas.

Peter F. was brought back to Woodson County and was buried at Nikkeltown.

Katharina, wife of Peter F. died in April and is also buried in the Nikkels Burying Place.

Peter F. and brother Cornelious were both ordained as ministers of the Mennonite Brethern Church. Their church services were held in the little stone schoolhouse in the Nikkletown settlement in Woodson County.

## EMIGRANT AID — by Charles B. Graves

Continued from the January issue —

About three miles south of the Ox-Bow crossing on the Neosho River, the snow was unbroken, but frozen so the oxen would break through at every step and the wagon was running very heavy. The oxen soon tired and I saw it would be a hard struggle to break the road home. At Alexander Brile's place which was the last house before entering upon a seven mile stretch of unbroken snow, and nothing by which to indicate the road, I felt that it would not be safe to attempt to cross that stretch of snow that night, so concluded to stay with the Briles. This was a somewhat noted place as Briles had kept a blacksmith shop. It was near where several roads from the west converged to the river crossing where the road entered LeRoy. It was about two miles south of Neosho City, which had been located on the banks of Big Creek a few years before when the county lines were not permanently established, as an ambitious competitor for the county seat. It erected and operated a steam saw-mill, which was quietly removed by unfriendly persons. After the mill shut down one Saturday night, and before the next Monday morning. This was the vital part of the city and it immediately expired. All indications of where the city had been located were soon obliterated. On this account and the decrease of population caused by the drouth, work was suspended at the blacksmith shop. (The home of Alexander Briles was in Coffey County about a half mile east of the Crandall Cemetery, not far from the north bank of Turkey Creek.) The snow was just as deep inside the shop as out. It was a very shaky place.

I had no hay and it seemed cruel to tie animals up in such a place. I hesitated wondering whether it would be better to venture the trip home, but finally decided to make the best of it. I knew Briles had no hay, and so took a sack of meal and poured a generous feed on the snow and regretfully turned away. The cattle did not taste the meal but looked around at me and as clearly as if it had been spoken expressed dissatisfaction and reproach at the situation. I appreciated fully their condition and how well they deserved more comfortable quarters, - indeed I had become very much attached to them and felt the rebuke keenly - even shed tears for them, but could not help it. I went into the house. The family lived in one room. They were sitting at the blazing fireplace; as soon as I opened the door they recognized me, and knowing where I had been took in the situation at once. They were as glad to see me as I was pleased to see them. It was early in the evening; they had not been to

supper; they had been without bread since morning but expected the arrival of supplies in a day or two. I was told of this as a reason why they could not invite me to supper. I brought in what was left of the sack of meal out of which I had been feeding; the boys had been hunting that day and their supply of rabbits and prairie chickens were plentiful. The cornbread was soon baking in the fire place, together with other things, and in due time we had a bountiful feast, to which we did full justice. After supper I mentioned the condition of my oxen, and expressed regret that I could not treat them better, but as no hay was to be had. Mrs. Briles said, "There is our best bed, the tick was just filled with nice prairie hay yesterday, but I expected you to sleep on it tonight. You might take it out, but if you did you will have to sleep on the floor. We can make you a good bed before the fire on a buffalo robe and some blankets." This rejoiced me more than I can tell. I lost no time in taking that hay to the cattle and they seemed as glad as I was. I returned to the house with a feeling of great satisfaction, went to bed on the floor and slept soundly.

In the morning I told them that the load of supplies which I had received by me to be distributed to the people of my district, and were charged to me for that purpose, and therefore I did not think I could distribute to them, as they were in another jurisdiction, but as they were expecting a supply, I would loan them a sack of meal until it came. This they gladly accepted and agreed to return a like sack as soon as received.

I then started home. The road had to be newly broken all of the way, but my oxen seemed full of strength and anxious to get home. The traveling was hard and they were tired when we arrived. Their owner took out of the load what he thought was right, and was generous to the people to whom the remainder was to be given.

The neighbors came in to see what I had brought home and what, if anything, was for them. They brought pillow slips for flour or anything else that I might have. I made an estimate of the number of people and the amount of supplies, and distributed accordingly. This was my first official experience and it has been a source gratification to me ever since to know that my conduct was entirely satisfactory to those for whom I acted.

In justice to Alexander Briles family, I must say that three days later a sack of meal was sent through the snow by a boy on horseback, in return for the one I loaned them.

## THE MATHIAS STEINER FAMILY —

Mathias Steiner was born of German parentage at Highland, Illinois, August 17, 1859, and died at Yates Center, Kansas, March 30, 1930. He was reared on a farm and grew to manhood at the place of his birth.

On November 11, 1884, he was married to his childhood schoolmate, Miss Barbara Dresch, at Highland, Illinois.

Barbara Dresch was born at Highland on January 15, 1867, and died in Yates Center, on October 26, 1949. She was the daughter of William Dresch and Catherine (Heiser) Dresch. William Dresch was from Meggersheim, Germany, and Catherine was from Hellmatt, a native of Lothring.

In 1894 the family came to Kansas and lived in Coffey County, near LeRoy, where they operated a restaurant and ran a dairy, delivering milk.

In 1905, the family came to Woodson County and bought a farm near Yates Center. Mr. Steiner with his family lived in the vicinity of Yates Center until his health failed and he sold his farm and moved to Yates Center. He was a farmer all his life.

Nine children were born to Mathias and Barbara Steiner: Joseph, Rose, Lena, Zeno, Elsie, Edward, Peter V., Hilda.

Joseph was born in Illinois in 1885, and was married to Bessie Williams. They had one son Leonard, who married Maxine Nokes.

Rose Steiner was born in Illinois in 1887. She was married to Charles Havens. They had two children, Douglas who married Gloria Berthiaume, and Barbara who married Lewis Horowitz.

Lena was born in Illinois in 1888. She married Harry Downey. They had no children.

Zeno was born in Illinois in 1890. He was married to Hazel Follis, April 24, 1918. Their children were: Melva, Ruth, William E., and Donald R. Melva was married to George Wallace Williamson. They were parents of three children: Judith Lee, Larry Robert, and James Michael. William E. married Evelyn Mulsow. They had two sons, William E. Jr. and Jackson that we will talk about later.

Elsie Steiner, also born in Illinois and was married to Dr. Joseph W. Kelso. They adopted a son, Joseph W. Kelso, Jr.

Erma Steiner was born in Kansas, 1894. She was married three times. First to Herbert Albord. They had three children, Erma Virginia who married Leland Morris, Genevieve who married Lester Lee Adams. The only boy, Stanley, died young. Erma was also married to Ross Reno and Rev. Miles Cook.

Edward Steiner died at the age of 21 years.



Picture of Mathias and Barbara Steiner and nine children. Back row - Zeno and Edwin - Center row L to R Pete, Lena, Joseph, Rose. Front row - Erma, Mathias Steiner, Hilda, Mother Barbara, and Elsie.



Peter V. was born in Kansas in 1897. He was married to Lois Shelton. They adopted twins, Joseph and JoAnn.

Hilda was also born in Kansas in 1899. She was married to Edward Eisenbardt. They had two children Maxine who married Roy Gollhier, and Dorothy who married Max Roberts.

\* \* \* \* \*

On November 25, 1950, at the age of 60 years, Zeno Steiner was killed when a Missouri Pacific train leaving the Durand yards, backing over him causing instant death. He was a long time railway employee and was a member of the crew which serviced the train for departure.

\* \* \* \* \*

The ancestral name of this family seemed to be Von Stein. The Von in German seemed to have the same meaning as Mister here. The word Von was dropped from the name and "er" added to the name.

The name of Steiner from this family was about to run out until the marriage of William E. and Evelyn (Mulsow) Steiner. They had two sons, William E., Jr. who married Linda Lou Laidlaw. They have two sons, Kirk Chadler and Brett Brandon. (2) Jackson Lynn, who married Linda Dianne Gibbs. They have two children Christopher Lane and Krystal Lyn.



**The William E. Steiner, Sr. Family**

**Left to right - Linda Lou and Wm. E., Jr. (Bill) and two sons, Brett and 'Chad', Evelyn and Wm. E., Sr., Jackson (Jack), Linda Dianne, 'Lane', and Krystal.**

\* \* \* \* \*

We may tell more about some of the Steiner's in the next issue.

## JOHN T. OWENS - "Armless Wonder" —

The first we remember hearing about John Owens was a story told to us by William H. Jackson, whom we have quoted several times before. Jackson was a small boy living with his parents in the north part of Yates Center. One afternoon one of his older brothers came home from downtown and asked William if he wanted to see a man without any arms at all play a violin.

William ran most of the way down to the south side of the square. This was in the forepart of the 1890's. Arriving there he found a group of people and three cowboys on their horses who had just drove a herd of cattle here from Fruito, Colorado. One of these cowboys had no arms, but sitting on the sidewalk he was playing the violin with his toes. He could also thread a needle with his toes.

John T. Owens was evidently born at Fruito, Colo. and was born without any arms. His parents wisely made no difference between him and his six brothers. He worked in fields and performed chores, he was allowed to develop his abilities because of his parents love and wisdom, and not held back because of his handicap.

For some reason John Owens seemed to stay around Woodson County., and around 1895 Owens was married to Mathilda (Tilly) Fry. She was daughter of Jacob and Amanda Fry who came to Woodson County in 1879, from Berks County Pennsylvania, and was known as the Pennsylvania-Dutch. Mathilda was one of nine children in the Fry family who lived for years in Eminence township.

John and Tillie Owens were parents of three children Dora, who was born in Colorado in 1896. Others were Ethel, Raye, and John Ernest Owens. Dora had a daughter Doris E., who married a man named Beavers. This granddaughter of John Timothy Owens and Mathilda (Tilly Fry) Owens, starting a book about her armless grandfather, but we never learned whether she got it finished or not.

The Owens family would travel in a wagon similar to the old medicine wagons as they traveled over the country giving shows with Owens, playing his violin and shooting his rifle and other demonstrations that many men with arms did not do. They would spend most of their winters in Yates Center.

The following notice appeared in a Yates Center newspaper in August, 1897.

Buffalo, Kansas - John Owens, the "Armless Phenomenon" gave an exhibition at the hall Friday night. Mr Owens married Tilly Fry, whose parents live near Rose, Woodson County. She and one brother accompanied him. The entertainment consisted

of the dexterity of Mr. Owens in using his toes to play musical instruments, fire off guns etc., and at the close he made a remark that those who were satisfied with his entertainment to tell their friends about his show and those who didn't to "keep still".

Another story told about John Owens was that his parents at one time owned a hotel and served meals, when he was a boy. He had learned from his mother how to mix an bake bread. When questioned who had made the bread Owens replied, I did - I scrubbed my feet very good - why aren't my feet as good and clean as your hands?

Around 1904-05, the Owens family had another mode of transportation for their travels. On the railroad siding at the west edge of Yates Center three small railway cars were stationed. This was the home and office of the John Owens family. Whenever Owens had an engagement for his entertainment the cars would be hooked to an engine going that way, and eventually back to Yates Center with the road show.

Sometime in 1905, Jim Schnell was the delivery boy for the Western Union Telegraph, and had to deliver a receipt for John Owens to sign and went to the railroad car home of the Owens family to get it signed. He handed it to Owens to sign. Owens wore low shoes that were easy to come off and wore socks with the toe cut out. The paper was put on the floor with the pencil-Owens picked up the pencil with his toes and wrote his name. Schnell said that this was done so slick that it was not nearly as exciting as he thought it would be.

Around 1906, John Owens had built a large two story house on the corner of Madison and Grove in Yates Center, where the family lived for years. (The Sheedy house.)

John Owens died in 1919 from exhaustion after performing the longest show of his life to a crowd that would not let him stop his entertainment.

\* \* \* \* \*

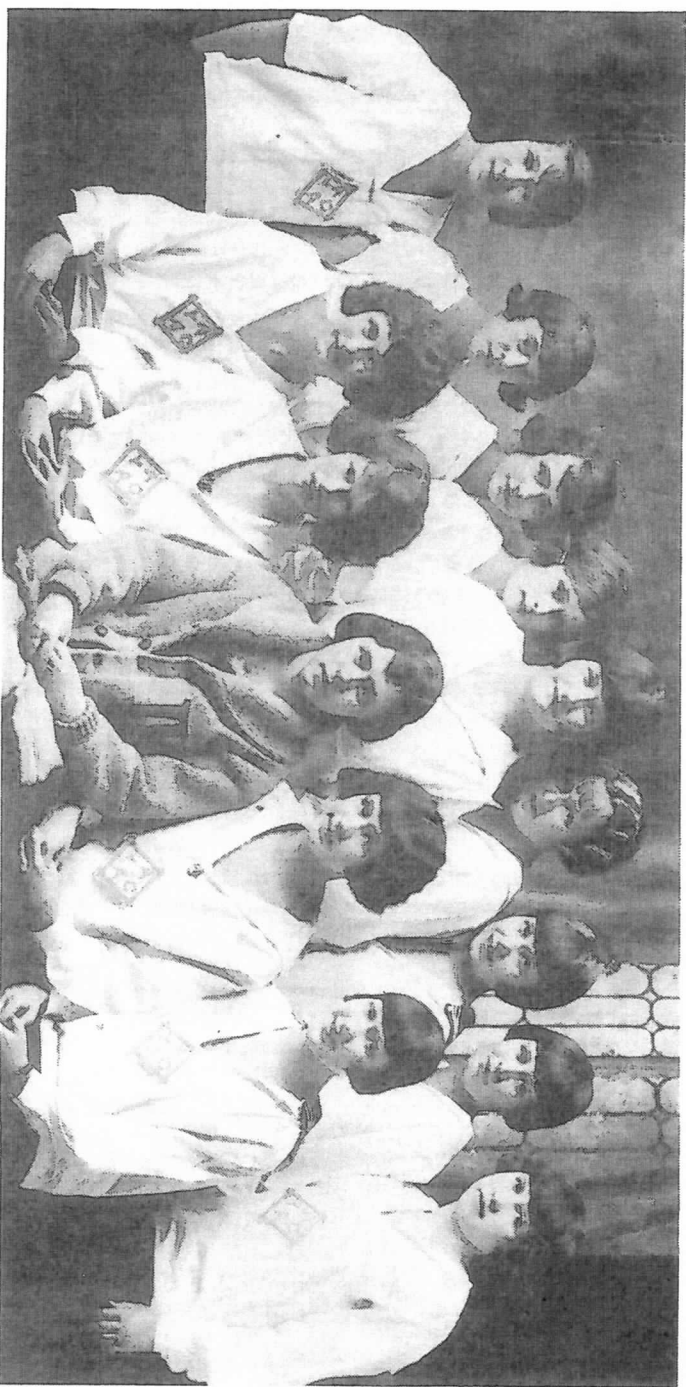
#### ODDS & ENDS

FARMER'S ADVOCATE - June 5, 1896 —

The services attending the laying of corner stone to the U.B. Church of Lily will be held Saturday 13th of June. Mrs. Ella Tharp will conduct the services. C.B. Reno Pastor

M.E. Church at Keck dedicated June 7, 1896. Rev. L.H. Murlan, President of Baker U., Speaker. Basket dinner at noon.

J.B. Mackenzie, Pastor



Yates Center High School Girl's Basketball team of around 1925. L to R: Helen Stange, Alta Moon ?, Mildred Gregg, Unknown, Madge Collins, Lucile Manifold, Virgie Mills, Alice Smith, Sarah Dunn. Seated: Josephine Hamilton, Chrystal Dew, Bonnie Ramey Stockebrand, Coach; Madeline McGowen, Clarabel Hamilton.

## A HANGING ON BIG SANDY CREEK —

While the story of the trail in the Big Sandy schoolhouse in the 1860's, no mention was made of a name nor where the three men were from, nor any details of those concerned. Searching in the pages of the "History of Neosho and Wilson Counties" brought this story out.

"An exciting event occurred in early history of Wilson County, with the examination of three men on charge or suspicion of horse stealing. This happened along Big Sandy Creek in May, 1866, in the territory of what is now in Webster township, Wilson County.

O. Summers an early day settler in that area was a Justice of the Peace and presided over the proceedings. The trial was held in the Big Sandy log schoolhouse just to the south of the county line. Summers acted as Magistrate, with the people gathered for the hearing constituted as the jury. The jury voted by ballot, of which were dropped in a hat. After all that voted that had wished to, it was decided by a large majority that the three men were guilty.

The three men being hung were, John House and Uriah Long both of Wilson County and William Jones of Woodson County.

Thomas Craig was the Sheriff of Wilson County, although, it seems that Wilson was very loosely organized as a county. David Faler was Sheriff of Woodson County. Whether either of these sheriffs or their deputies were present was not told. Wilson County evidently did not have a jail and the jail such as it was for Woodson County was at Neosho Falls.

The 'Justice' ordered the three prisoners taken to jail at Neosho Falls, to await trial. While the officer was taking them to his home nearby after night a mob forceably took them from him, taking them farther up Big Sandy where all three were hung. Who the 'officer' was, never was told.

Another version of this story was that two of the men, evidently the two from Wilson County were served their last breakfast at the Josiah Daniel home. This was the log cabin that Daniels had just built that spring, and is at present located on the grounds at the Woodson County Historical Museum. The third man, probably William Jones from Woodson County was taken to the Absolum Harp home.

This man was hung on a blackjack oak in the front yard of the Harp home. This was in the northeast corner of the north-west quarter of Section 35, Twp. 26, R. 14. The other two men were hung to the limbs of a large oak tree about thirty yards from the first one. This tree stood on the west side of the road where a small branch crossed the road.

The mob mentioned above was a group of Vigilantes that were organized over along the Verdigris Valley. The one version told that the Vigilantes had held this trial and that it lasted for two or three weeks. This did not seem feasible as the brand of justice the Vigilantes dealt out would last but a short time. However, the hangings seemed to be the work of that organization.

This triple hanging in the south part of Woodson County occurred on May eighth, 1866. A short time before this hanging, evidently the same month a young man was hung just to the north of Coyville about a mile. This hanging also was credited to the same "Vigilance Committee".

\* \* \* \* \*

Back in the early settlement of Woodson County, there were several localities that organized Vigilante Committee to help in keeping of law and order. However, the Vigilante group that operated up and down the Verdigris Valley seemed to create a bad name for themselves. Perhaps they got the blame for more than their share, but there are many tales of this group. Tales were told that it was not safe for lone travelers to come through the area. They would be robbed of their possessions and maybe lose their lives.

Horse stealing seemed to be the crime for which the Vigilantes were organized for mostly. A bill of sale was needed for horses and other. An innocent man was often hung or shot. We also believe that as these tales were handed down through the years that more would be added to them and some of the truth would be left out. While some of these Vigilante groups might do something unlawful the entire group would get the blame.

We will not vouch for the entire truthfulness of some of the tales we will tell as "the spectacular" is something people like to write and read about. No names are mentioned but anyone familiar with or has done research on can readily tell who the tales are about.

\* \* \* \* \*

#### "Confessions of a Vigilante" —

A few years after the turn of the century the community along the Verdigris Valley was saddened by the death of a pioneer who settled along the Verdigris River about the time of the Civil War. He was well-to-do and had a numerous relatives.

As he lay dying he confessed his sins to some of his family. Many years before he had been a vigilante who had helped hang a horse thief. Later the Vigilantes were embarrassed when some of their victims relatives came along looking for

him. It was learned that he wasn't guilty of the crime he was hung for. The Vigilantes were suspicious of the victim because he was prosperous. A young man was to be poor. When asked he could not produce a bill of sale so they hung him.

The group doing the hanging had divided up his possessions among themselves-one fellow getting a good team of horses, another received an almost new wagon. Perhaps other possessions were received by other members of the group.

Threats were made by the relatives of the deceased, such as getting even with him after he died by stealing his body from the grave and dumping it in the river. The pioneers family were greatly upset upon learning the story. The former vigilante died on Thursday and was buried the next day. His wife died some fifteen years later, but there was no reprisal to the deed that the old pioneer confessed to.

\* \* \* \* \*

#### "A Vigilante in Later Life."

It is rather interesting to note how some of these former Vigilantes lived in later life. They were perhaps regretful of some of the deeds they had done or accused of doing. The story is told about a certain man that became very religious, and had perhaps had regretted and confessed to some of the deeds he had been a party to. He generously gave land to build a church and schoolhouse on, and was active in the work of that church.

The story has been told of a certain incident that occurred one Sunday during church. A group of boys were playing outside of the church while the man was giving a prayer. One of the boys shouted, "kick the box out from under him!" (This seemed to be the way some of the victims were supposedly hung.) The man was so upset that he could not finish his prayer. He just sat down and seemingly filled with remorse. He had become an influential and useful man in that locality.

\* \* \* \* \*

Just to the south of the Woodson-Wilson county line a small stream called Pig Creek empties into the west side of the Verdigris River. It was evidently named for a man named Pigg, who was an early settler along the county line. Pig Creek ran into the river about a half mile below where the Carlisle Branch goes into the river or less than a mile below the Toronto Dam.



Whether they knew that Mr. Pigg was sick in bed or not, one day a group of men rode up to the Pigg homestead with the intention of driving off some of the cattle. With her husband sick in bed, Mrs. Pigg apparently saw the group coming and met them at the gate armed with a gun. She told them that she would shoot anyone that tried to take any of their cattle. Apparently the group of men were not looking for resistance and believed the trouble it would cause was not worth it, rode away and left the Pigg family alone.

\* \* \* \* \*

When we talk about the Vigilantes along the Verdigris Valley our readers perhaps may get the impression that they all came from the area just to the south of Toronto. It is true that this was rather a strong organization. But rather the Verdigris Valley that we are writing about was from several miles above the present Toronto, in Greenwood Co. to below Coyville in Wilson County. The only town above was Pleasant Grove, a couple of miles up the river from Toronto. Evidently there were several groups of Vigilantes along this area along the Verdigris River, as there was no law between Neosho Falls and Eureka. Along practically every creek or settlement there were some kind of a vigilance committee.



**The Yates Center Normal Training Class of 1929, with A.J. Jones as the instructor. The back row: left to right, A.J. Jones, Mona Woodcock, Gertrude Sago, Melba Frevert, Leota Mulsow, Margaret Scott, Cleo Theobald.**

**Front row: Carol Lauber, Ruth DeLaughder, Hazel Dawson, Loraine Smith, Edna Mae Weide.**

# **PATRONS OF WOODSON COUNTY HISTORICAL QUARTERLY**

Brown's Western Auto	Lynn and Gail Cantrell
Milton & Virginia Schornick	Gaulding Oil Co.
Kenneth & Barbara Stockebrand	Donald E. Ward
John V. Glades Agency	Clyde Hill
Street Abstract Co., Inc.	Kimbell Ranch-Ed. Kimbell
State Exchange Bank	Edwin H. Bideau Assoc.
Self Service Grocery	Agencies-Chanute
Krueger Variety & Dry Goods	First National Bank-Toronto
Piqua Farmer's Co-op	Hi-Way Food Basket
Morton Equipment Co.	Atkin Clinic
Swope & Son Implement Co.	Blackjack Cattle Co., Inc.
Superior Bldg. & Supply, Inc.	Yates Center Elevator
The Herring Families	Jaspers Shopping Spot
Cantrell Hay Co.,	Daly Western Supply
Craig Cantrell	Linde Barber Shop
Artex Manufacturing Co.	Campbell Plmg. & Electric
J. C. Schnell	Bill Taylor-Gen. Agent
Wilma Mark	Woodson Co. Farm Bureau
Yates Center News	Jaynes Insurance Agency
Gambles Hardware &	Glenn Shaw
Home Furnishings	Elmer E. Light
Pringle Ranch-	Milton & Marcella Wrampe
J. Richard Pringle	Loren & Rita Cantrell
Atkin Rexall Pharmacy	Al's Jewelry
Campbell Funeral Home	Edwin G. Reid, St. Louis, MO
Glen & Zola Baker	Rex Butler, Nashville, TN
Piqua State Bank	Thomas Wilson
Ken Kimbell	Bill Herman
Steiner's Sundries	Kenneth & Mabelle Ferree
C. L. "Matty" & Luriel Mathews	Abbott & Ethel Crandall

